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### Cole Phillips

Rick Wormeli's focus during chapters 11-13 of *Fair Isn't Always Equal* is primarily grading. Chapter 11, in particular, shows Wormeli devoting a lot of his time to reflecting the name of his book. What is fair in grading? How best can we accurately measure a student's learning through grading? And is it ever appropriate to offer a zero? Wormeli had some suggestions.

Offering a zero on a missed assignment misrepresents a student's final average after the grading is finalized because of averaging. Wormeli goes on to explain that because we typically offer a forty-point margin for passing and a 60-point margin for failing (thirty and seventy, respectively, in my high school) a zero can devastate a grade for all of the wrong reasons. And, so, is it immoral to give a student a zero? Is it an immoral system, in general, devoting more than half of a grading scale to failing? Wormeli suggests a smaller scale for grading, which is, incidentally, a better approach. I, however, would suggest a

complete pass/fail standard. Let's level the proverbial playing field and enable all students to succeed. We devote a whole lot of time concerning student success in every single way possible, and to treating students as people, while we devote a whole lot of grading to numerical denominations of technically failing. During chapter 12, in fact, Wormeli focuses on just this.

Wormeli suggests that a smaller scale for grading can eliminate the problematic position of giving zeros, and that it can also display mastery more easily. He suggests it is less messy and comes down to being more effective in the blackest/whitest sense. And if as the grading scale becomes smaller, results become more accurate in determining knowledge and become, generally, fairer, why then do we perpetuate a flawed system of messily large scale? The smallest, most basic indicator of ability is the one that simply says "Yes," or "No." A pass/fail system's integration into schools lifts weight from everyone's shoulders, more easily justifies either end of the spectrum, and is more sensible to the student earning the grade.

Wormeli offers, throughout chapter thirteen, the idea that grade books need to be set up appropriately. He suggests cramming in as much information as possible, rather than just numerical or letter grades, so that we don't lose track of our reasoning. A student earning a mid-lower mark shouldn't be dismissed or written off, but should be assessed for problem areas and how to improve. Maintaining a well-organized grade book is essential to knowing your grades and knowing the students earning them on a better level.

Chapter fourteen is a report card chapter that really seems to tie together the former chapters. Wormeli touches on the major aspect of unity between the chapters, which is that a simple grade is not enough. He suggests report cards be comprehensive, allowing room for writing, explanation, and multiple aspects of grading. As an indicator of learning, knowledge, and potential for mastery, a report card should be more than a concise list of right or wrong.

## **Tyler Michaud**

Chapters eleven through fourteen of *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, by Rick Wormeli, focused on grading and how it should be reported to the students, parents, school, and any other relevant person. One of the main ideas that I took from the text is that the larger and more various the sample of work, the more useful and fair the results will be. Should a student receive a "0" or a "60"? This argument, in chapter eleven, is a hot-button issue among educators. An observation the author made has always been on my mind: the range for grades A, B, C, and D (on a 100 point scale) is, on average, a total of 40 points, while the range for an F is 60 points, how is that fair? Putting a zero in the grade book is ethically wrong for it creates a nearly insurmountable challenge for the student. Additionally, mentioned also in chapter twelve, a 1 to 4 scale was discussed which I think is much fairer to the students, as even the lowest score is not overwhelmingly devastating to their total grade. Also, it makes it easier to establish definite criteria for each grade regardless of subject. Discussed in both chapters eleven and thirteen, I found that weighing grades is a smart way to let the students' work speak for itself; for example, an essay is probably worth more than a questionnaire, so by scoring it as such it will provide a more accurate representation of skills learned and developed. Lastly, chapter fourteen examined report cards and their helpfulness. Many schools are trying to design a more useful

report card that provides more information. The text talked about the dual approach, which grades students on personal growth as well as against the standards, part of me truly likes this idea for it will give a better representation of the students' achievements. However, I can also see what the book was saying about it providing information that might make the school look bad; for example, if an advanced student receives a high mark, but their personal progress was minimal due to their prior knowledge, it could make the school year appear to be an overall waste of time. As a teacher, understanding why and how you are grading is crucial. Personally, I would like to adopt the 1 to 4 scale as I do agree that it is fairer. But beyond that, an awareness of what you expect your students to learn from each lesson and assignment will create a more positive learning environment. With that, if you know what you expect your students to learn then it should be relatively easy to apply weights to assignments that are more significant. Although I have yet to grade any work, I have edited papers, so drawing on that experience I have mentioned above what I think makes for the most effective grading techniques: one that will provide ample opportunity to all students.

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## Ashley Godbout

Chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14 of FIAE were about grading. These chapters were extremely helpful in continuing my understanding of grading and different ways to go about it. My mentor teacher let me grade homework, quizzes and a test during my time in her classroom. It was so much more difficult than I thought! Giving partial credit was the most challenging aspect and dealing with failing grades on assignments. It tore me apart to write a 23 on the top of a student's test or put zeros in the grade book for missing work. Chapter 11 discussed what to do when a student doesn't hand in work or gets a failing grade. Do you record a 0 or a 60? Before I started the chapter my thoughts were "obviously a 0 if they didn't turn in the assignment, how do you give credit to someone who didn't do the work?" However, this chapter quickly changed my opinion. We calculate grades according to the mean (average) of all the scores together but this doesn't give us a good representation of the student's mastery. Recording a zero severely misrepresents a student's grade and has an inappropriate amount of influence on the student's evaluation. Giving the student a 60 isn't giving them credit for something they haven't done, it's adjusting their grade so it's appropriately justified. If a student hands in late work the first thing a teacher should consider is if it's an occasional or frequent occurrence. If it's occasional then the teacher should be merciful and let it go, however, if it's frequent the teacher needs to intervene. Late work should receive two grades. One to show mastery or what their full credit grade would be and one that has been deducted for being late. This helps the teacher make educational decisions that are based off of useful information. The next topic was grading scales. On a 100 point scale students are graded based on mathematical averages, however, this can make a grade very inaccurate. Basing a grade off of rubrics with clear descriptions is going to give a much clearer description of the student's mastery. The book suggests not using minuses on grades because it tells students they're at the lower end of a grade. It's better to look at the positive side of things and use grades and pluses. The next section talks about grade books. I think the question on the first page is extremely important to ask yourself as a teacher: "Does this format respond to the differentiated approaches I'm using with my students? If so, how?" Anything to increase the usefulness of grades is worth the time because generalized grades are not accurate or useful. I love the idea of topics based grade books that allow students to see specific and detailed feedback. The last section is on report cards. Reports should provide feedback, document the student's progress, and inform instructional decisions. These chapters are

so important to always keep in mind as a teacher. Grading is such a relevant aspect of teaching, however, we can improve our methods all the time. The goal is to create an atmosphere that is less focused on grades and more focused on learning and mastery. The grade obsession that has corrupted schools is awful and very heartbreaking to see as a college student. It's a problem that school districts need to tackle and teachers should adopt because I think a lot of students would see the value in their education if it wasn't all about grades.

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## **Matt Potter**

Chapter eleven in FIAE focuses a lot on grading. For teachers, grading is the hardest, most argument based topic that is dealt with in education in my opinion. It is a constant struggle to keep your head above water when you are repeatedly dealing with students, parents, state/school standards, and others expectations. They present six burning issues of grading. The first is whether or not to put a zero on record or a significantly low grade that will affect a student's grade immensely. On the other end of that number two is on grading your gifted students. According to the book, this is an easy problem to solve. It isn't based on grading students easier, or harder, and giving more or less work. Instead we should focus on student ability and find creative ways to challenge students. We can do this by altering questions or assignments to allow students to think on a higher level, or even altering questions to guide a student in a specific direction. This topic also discussed weighing grades, and special needs grading.

The scales in which we grade on are discussed in chapter 12, as well as the impact scales have on our students. There are two basic ways to scale and grade. Either a four-point scale, or a one hundred-point scale is suggested. The one hundred-point scale is most common in education, but I feel the four-point scale is most effective with what we are trying to do with McTighe's methods and planning strategies. The four-point scale allows us to bring in participation, standards, effort, and improvement into our grading. Unlike the one hundred-point scale where we just add up a graded assignment.

Chapter thirteen touches mainly on formatting your grade book. As new teachers it is important that we do this with differentiation in mind. Grouping based on standard is a good place to start. Following this we should group by assignments, unit, and grade weight. By having a well grouped, and organized grade book we can show a student's progress, and success. Being consistent with the grade book is also important. Listing things by date, and filling in grades in a timely fashion are essential for being a productive, and fair as a teacher.

Chapter fourteen is based on report cards. The chapter states that a dual approach is most effective. As teachers we should be looking at personal progress, and meeting standards. We would not just be simply looking at the letter grades of students. With our report cards there should be multiple categories including but not inclusive to: units, assignments, and final grades. Progress reports should be done consistently as well as positive.

These four chapters are highly useful for teachers, especially for new teachers because every teacher struggles with how to grade, and how to raise the success of their students. We as teachers need to be fair to our students, and also make sure that we push them to their highest abilities. We can achieve this by grading them the correct ways and by showing their progress over a year or more.

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## **Meghan Hughes**

Chapter 11 of FIAE focuses on grading. Grading is one of the most daunting aspects of becoming a teacher. This topic has strong arguments on both ends of the spectrum in terms of the value and

effectiveness of grading in education. The author presents major issues when it comes to grading; do we use zeros or really low grades that may strongly alter a student's overall grades? This issue also becomes seriously relevant when dealing with how to grade gifted students as well. Both of these issues can play into amounts of bias experienced in the classroom. This is where it comes to the teacher's decision, whether to base work on effort, or on correctness. Changing questions and assignments based on a student to student education could also help increase a student's chance of learning and success. The issue of giving students a zero for missing work is an issue that a lot of teachers struggle with because of the overpowering impact that zero might have on a student's overall grade. As a future teacher, I think each teacher should have a policy when it comes to late or missing work. What ever that policy might entail, it should always be made clear to students at the beginning of the semester/year. One policy I have always liked is the idea that homework is one whole grade, so each assignment is a certain number of points out of that whole percentage. I think this would avoid ruining a student's overall grade because they did not have time to complete a single homework assignment.

The importance of maintaing an organized grade book is a main topic of chapter 13. Keeping student work organized and grades organized will be essential to having a level or respect between you and your students. Also keeping track of student progress may help keep track of the changing levels of all students. Report cards also have a great deal to do with a grade book. Traditional report cards do not always tell the whole story of what is going on in the classroom. Report cards are especially important because parents will see them, as they are often addressed to the parent of the student. Report cards can lead to unpleasanties between parents and the teacher, which does not bode well for the teacher. These chapters were effective in discussing controversial topics, and providing examples and solutions for these problems.

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## **Devin Boilard**

### **FIAE: Chapters: 11, 12, 13, & 14**

Chapter 11 touches on a topic that I have been very interested in hearing a case for, the grade book zero. I must admit that I was quite surprised to read the justification of why this practice should be avoided; I had already prepared my debate, which hit on the topic of student accountability and proper grade representation. Surprisingly I found math at the center of the argument, an argument that worked well with my planned points, to convince me that zeros have no place in the grade book. Emma L. Davis, a Virginia Beach school board member who is quoted on page 138, compares the situation to that of recording an average temperature over a period of days. This metaphor does well to capture the flaw of recording zeros in the absence of work. Of the methods described, I think I am most likely to implement in my classroom the one that suggests entering "I" for incomplete into my grade book and then calculating more of a median or mode in grade trends apposed to the mean. I found the topic of weighting grades an interesting one to return to from my youth, this was a highly debated topic at my high and due to the fact that I was student body president and enrolled in many of the AP classes that were at the heart of the discussion, so I found myself too. Having looked at this topic as a student it is interesting to now come at it from a teacher's point of view. I now have a better understanding of why the administration and staff were so unmotivated on the matter while the student body (those enrolled in higher tiered classes at least) was really the voice behind the matter. In conclusion to the argument, GPAs and their significance are really minute matters and I love how the chapter makes a point to express this while discussing this topic. My high school GPA does little to reflect me as a student or a person; the added

efforts of weighting would only further manipulate this expression.

The topic of what grades mean has been adequately discussed in this book, Chapter 12 was a nice review on how we can better express these meanings. By the end of this chapter I was convinced of the benefits of using a 5.0 scale in my grading. I prefer this system opposed to the more common 4.0 scale as it deviates from the even more common A, B, C, D scale. The 5.0 scale in addition offers teachers an opportunity of being less objective thanks to the pairing and implementation of rubrics with graded work. Additionally I noted the comments on the use of “+” and “-” and while I had previously thought they could be great tools and of benefit to express students mastery I agree with the comments made on page 156 that note their lack to motivate and their at time destructive nature. In sync with topic of grades is how we enter them into the grade book and what does this system look like. I have to admit this is a topic that was completely off my radar, not once have I thought about what system I might use or even what my options are. I think Chapter 13 did well to enlighten me on the topic. I felt of the options gone over in the chapter I would be most likely to use the one depicted in image 13.3 on page 166, grouping by weight or category. I appreciate the ability to differentiate with how I multiply the categories, and I think it also allows for the benefit of tracking assignments by date. I will say that I still have many questions about this topic and wonder if most schools even allow teacher choice or if a particular program is purchased by the schools and enforced for teacher use? This same question I found myself asking while reading Chapter 14 in reference to report cards. I found this chapter intriguing as well but doubt whether my opinion on the matter will be of much weight. I do find the discussion on student comparison in reference to paternal concerns a concerning one. I feel the most important discussion between a parent and teacher should be what the grades mean and how the report card expresses it.

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## **Christopher Vogel**

Chapter 11 in FIAE focuses on the impact of the grading scale. The initial discussion is how to handle 0s in the grade book. I thought this was the most significant part of the chapter because it tackles a highly disputed issue. The single benefit of using zeros is to punish students who do not turn in homework. And anyone in the psychology field knows that punishments will only get you so far in removing a behavior. Some teachers use 0s as a “motivator” to get students to complete the homework or assignment. I think the book highlights a perfect strategy to use when dealing with 0s when grading time comes around. 0s or other missing work should be given a 60. This means a student can receive a more accurate grade without getting credit for doing no work. The teacher should then come up with other strategies to get students motivated to complete the assigned work.

The grading scale is discussed in chapter 12. Rick Wormeli compares and contrasts percentage based grading with small scale grading. Percentage based learning is often more mathematical in finding a student’s grade and is more “accurate.” Small scale grading can often better reflect student mastery of a subject. Wormeli highlights the fact that teachers will guestimate what a student should receive as a grade based on information like a student having mostly 5s and a few 4s gets an A. I like the idea Wormeli presents throughout the chapter which involves using a combination of both scales. The important thing to remember is students are learning to master the subject and more often than not come to class without

mastery. When determining a student's grade that fact should be taken into consideration.

Chapter 13 presented multiple ways to set up a grade book. I felt that the key point to this section is being flexible with how you set up a grade book. It is important to remember that different situations in the classroom could call for a different method of recording information. In addition it is important for a teacher to record as much information as he/she can on a grade. A plain C would not tell how well a student mastered a topic. If the teacher would instead say that the student does well on this topic but struggles on this topic, more understanding of the student's mastery is revealed. Chapter 14 follows with a description on handling report cards. I thought the best strategy listed was including multiple categories in one subject. There have been multiple times throughout this course and readings that indicate a simple letter grade does not accurately reflect all that a student does in the classroom. It is critical that students, parents and administrators understand the multi-dimensional aspects of learning. Last time I checked a letter does not tell a student what they excelled at, what they struggled with, or what they could improve on.

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## **Russell Warren**

These later chapters of Wormeli's *Fair Isn't Always Equal* deals solely with the topic of grading. While some of this reading can get tedious, these chapters on grading were especially interesting to me as a teacher, as there is so much to consider and so much to take into account when grading assignments. Did students know they were getting graded on this? How do I grade their opinions? Should I use grades as a punishment? How can I get it so that students' aren't so grade-obsessed? These questions and ideas surrounding them were dealt with deftly here.

At the beginning Wormeli dives into the topic of grading specific students - namely under and over achieving ones. The problem with giving zeros is a tricky one. I agree with the author that we should not use zeros to punish the students, as the extremely low grade will largely impact their grades, but I also have a problem with giving the students a 60. If they didn't do the work, why should they receive a grade? Won't this encourage not doing the work rather than trying to do it, as they see no matter what they will receive a passing grade? A way to alleviate this in my book would to grade large assignments, one where they get class time to work on them so they have no excuse not to do it, and to grade homework on a done/not done duality. This chapter also details how to grade gifted students, and he says it's more about what we provide them with as a test and not so much how we grade. I totally agree with this, and I like the idea of editing tests.

Chapter Twelve details what scales we are grading on. He provides two types: a four-point scale and a one hundred-point scale. While the latter, in the form of percentages, tends to be more mathematically sounds, I find that it doesn't allow for the student's voice to be heard. To me, one-hundred scales should be used on tests and quizzes, giving students examples of how they will be graded on standardized testing. A four-point scale is much more efficient in my mind, especially for an English class, as it allows student expression to come through and can be graded in multiple different categories. It also takes away the weighted baggage of getting a 100%.

Wormeli then goes on to talk about grade books and report cards. I found the prior to be very helpful, as it'll be extremely important to me to have access to all students' grades in a simple and easy to use format. There needs to be plenty of room, as he suggests, for my own comments as well, so that the pages don't look like an accountant's workbook but rather a dedicated teachers grade book. Finally, chapter fourteen

details report cards. In a similar fashion to the grade book, I agree that report cards should not just be numbers and letter grades – they should be in-depth looks into the minds and intelligences of the students. It seems ridiculous to me that by high school there is only room for a sentence or two about the student's progress, and that they must choose from a preset list of phrases. If this is the case, teachers should work diligently to email parents and guardians and have them involved. Producing a grading system like this gets the parents more involved in the curriculum and makes the students more involved in the material and their understanding rather than their numerical grades.

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